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Projection of Diaspora: Multiculturalism and Quest for Identity in the Selected Works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anita Rau Badami

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What is Diaspora?

Diaspora Studies examine the dispersions of populations and cultures across various geographical places and spaces. This discipline is emerging as a cutting-edge area of research alongside studies on globalization, nationalism, and post coloniality. Diaspora is one of the most debated terms today, especially within scholarly discussions about migration, displacement, identities, community, global movements, and cultural politics. "Diaspora" (from the Greek word for "scattering") refers to the dispersion of a people from their homeland. The term diaspora has emerged has a new discipline in English literature across the globe. It has become international recognition to study the different cultures and life style of the people of their homeland and nostalgia of the writers residing away from their country. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, where the writers express their existential rootlessness, immigrant experience and dilemma in adjusting of new cultures. The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration be, for jobs, marriages or for better life and opportunities had taken into consideration, but the nostalgia remains in their mind and heart. The cultural affiliation in a diaspora is often found in community resistance to language change and in maintenance of traditional religious practices.

India has produced many talented writers who serve as a source inspiration to the coming generation. The Indian Diaspora in US and other parts of the world has made a significant impact on the contemporary literary culture. First generation and second generation writers give us a picture of Indian society and they also cover diverse issues including the various problems faced by Indian people. Diasporic writers who have established themselves in the literary world are V.S.Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherji, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, and Anita Rau Badami etc. South Asian immigrants have come across several issues to frame their identities in alien shore. Writers have exposed the rich cultural heritage of India to the world readers. The writers thematic style of writing novels, short stories are of Indian fragrance, narrates the Indian thought, mysticism, fantasy, ancient tales, and feel of immigrant experience at large.

The world wide dispersion of South Asian people from countries such as India, Srilanka, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh is now a sociological acknowledged phenomenon known as South Asian Diaspora. The literature of South Asian diaspora is a minority discourse that is surfacing with urgency in the field of cultural studies in the world.

Multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism appeals as a kind of cultural globalization to non-western countries with its apparent liberal democratic contents. This is why multiculturalism has become an obsession with literary authors and critics who claim to 'decentre' the hegemony of the west. Multiculturalism requires the assignment of transitive, transformatory and emancipatory meaning to cultural differences, rather than confixing it to 'exclusionary' mode. Thus, multiculturalism cannot liberate oppressed classes, both in the sense of economic classes and the classroom as a space for pedagogical practices universality remains far cry.

Multiculturalism in the context of the U.S and rest of the world had been bought into cultural discourse to understand the various constructions of cultural identity in a multi-ethnic and multi-racial world. But multiculturalism in a broader sense generally refers to the doctrine that cultural diversity should be recognized as a permanent and valuable part of political societies. Multiculturalism in the U.S and other countries of the world has not succeeded in projecting the ongoing process of social construction of collective identities.

Quest for Identity:

Quest for identity, recognition on alien shore is a challenging task to mingle with the new culture and life style. Immigrants have to strive hard to get identified, but they are victimized under certain circumstances. The politics of localization and globalization makes it necessary to have workable notion to how social groups are unified by a common culture and at the same time the need to identify genuine cultural differences and similarities across the groups. The identity crisis and feminine sensibility between homeland and immigrant shore is always a burning issue for writers in diasporic literature. South Asian or any immigrant never forgets his/her motherland hence; we see their lives through characters in written form. Expatriate experience is a dilemma for writers to depict the Indian phenomenon in their works.

In globalization cultural or name identities is a disturbing factor for immigrants because they have to change their names and cultures in foreign land. For instance, Jagjeet becomes Jaggi or Jaggu, Someshwar becomes Sam or Samuel, Poornima becomes Poorvi and Zakir becomes

Jack etc. They have to be transformed and it is inevitable for them (immigrants). Quest for identity is studied with cultures, names and feminine sensibility and other issues relevant to the subject.

The Indians have dispersed migrated and have spread across the globe. They have settled especially in U.S where they are significant population. The social significance of the Asians in America is that they are neither black nor white and hence beyond the binary construction of the difference. The Asians (Indians) in America exhibit complex manifestation of the east – west encounter and complicate the either or definition of the color lines of the twentieth century. The first and second generation immigrants who had settled in abroad are always in search of their identities.

There is lot of ambiguity reflected in the attempt for self representation in the studies of Asian literature in English translation and Asian American literature. Cultural projection in literature and pedagogical practices constitute the deconstructing of myth of the benevolent United States which offers a lot of promises to men and women to Asia (Indians).

Nature of Problem

As for as research work is concerned, all the above issues will be discussed in detail for how and why the concept of diaspora is studied as a branch of study in English literature and its importance to expose to the world readers.

1. What are the hurdles to be solved in the select novels?
2. How do the writers look at the issues of diasporic elements?
3. How and why is it relevant to discuss the expatriate experience of immigrants to readers mind?
4. Why it has become a burning issue to find writers' personal and emotional attachment towards their homeland and how it is accepted by the readers?
5. How to find solution to establish universal culture and identities for socio – political agenda?
6. What is the status of immigrant writers in alien shore?
7. East-West encounter and projection of Indian philosophies by criticizing Westernization.
8. How the writers' justify their works to both homeland and residing country?

Hypothesis

1. In search of fact findings both written and practical experience of Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anita Rau Badami are deeply rooted with diasporic writings.
2. The most significant agenda of South Asian writers, especially with reference to Indian diasporic writers' process has initiated with new dimensions to acquire attention of world readers to look after rich cultural heritage of India.
3. Urgency of Communal harmony and universal identity among people across the world
4. The notion is clearly presented by the Indian writers without disturbing native readers of foreign land.
5. It is also believed that unless and until we go through the study of diasporic elements, we will not be able to perceive the expected and intended concerns to diagnose and reframe the structure of diaspora in detail. Hence, these authors need to be interpreted in the context of diaspora and come out with the new paradigms of emerging topics.

Objectives

1. To study the novels from the perspective of diasporic elements.
2. To analyse and reframe the values of multiculturalism and quest for identity in elaborate way.
3. To study how do the writers fetch the Indian phenomenon by exploring their past memories with contemporary issues.
4. To study Indian diaspora as a crucial and recent trend in South Asian literature.
5. To comprehend the interdisciplinary nature of diasporic elements
   integrates culture, ethics, feminism and philosophy.
6. To establish Jhumpa Lahiri, C.B.Divakaruni and Anita Rau Badami as an eminent authors of projecting diasporic writings.

Research Methodology

Diaspora literature (South Asian Indian diaspora in United States) is emerging as a cutting-edge area of research alongside studies on globalization, nationalism, and post coloniality. Through readings, film, field work, interviews of authors in magazine, newspapers,

journals and critical reviews etc. We will examine the impact of migration on individuals, families and communities and analyze that illuminate the experience of South Asians who live in various cities and suburbs across United States.

Through readings and field work, we will explore the different diasporic elements and analyze the fact findings and document in a written form. Depending on the text matter, parameters would be developed and applied for perceiving and diagnosing the text in a diasporic perspective. Therefore, the methods of research have been critical, evaluative, analytical, interpretive, descriptive and comparative. These methods would be employed as per the issues taken for deliberation and reference.

Scope and Limitations of Research

The research would deal with the literary contribution of three authors Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anita Rau Badami. The select works comprise *The Namesake*, *The Lowland* and *Hell- Heaven* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Mistress of Spices, Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Tamarind Mem, The Hero's Walk, Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* by Anita Rau Badami would be considered for detailed analysis to project Indian diasporic elements.

As far as research work is concerned, as per requirement, an attempt would be made to study short stories, non-fiction of these writers, if it is relevant to the core subject and necessity to expose the themes of their works. This research would be restricted to the selected novels; however, as per need a few texts would be added or skipped at the juncture or in an ambivalent situation. So, the research is aimed to study the main issues of presentation.

Contribution to the Branch of Knowledge

Since from the post 1965 immigration era to 1980's and 1990's many South Asians have made their homes in U.S and settled their lives in alien shore. The literature of the South Asian diaspora is a minority discourse that is exposing with urgency in the field of cultural studies in the United States. Despite being the fourth largest Asian American community, South Asian diaspora, especially, Indian diaspora is rapidly approaching the main stream of Asian literature as a group, has largely been overlooked by historians and social scientists in the United States. The Present exploration of study would expose the diasporic elements such as dislocation, fragmentation, nostalgia for home, racial, cultural and gender hatred, identity crisis, generation differences, cross-cultural interaction, disintegration of family units of Indian diaspora leading to

anguish, traumas and dilemma suffered by the members of such families etc. Thus, the study of Indian diaspora would be helpful to relocate, reframe and analyze the contemporary issues to the branch of study of Asian American literature and to create awareness about communal harmony and spread humanity across the globe.

Chapter I

Introduction

In the introductory chapter will be discussed on the origin, meaning and history of diaspora and its elements in detail. Besides, a number of co- related concepts relevant to the above mentioned topic will also be discussed elaborately. South Asian diaspora,, Indian writers such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherji, Meena Alexander etc, and their contribution to the English literature will be discussed in brief. And Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Anita Rau Badami's works will be focused on their writing themes and will be presented in the study.

Chapter II

Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner and most influential and significant writer from the South Asian American (Indian diaspora) literature. She has reached a new paradigm of bicultural experience. In this study, novels such as The Namesake and The Lowland will be analyzed in detail with Indian diasporic elements. And other works of fiction and non-fiction will be discussed in brief as relevant to subject. But Lahiri's main two novels will be focused in the study.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* most acclaimed novel deals with conflict in relationships between couples, families and friends. The main theme of the novel is about the name, a name is probably the first and foremost thing which gives identity to the person. She explores the ideas of cultural and personal isolations and identities through her various characters. The novel conveys the experience of alienation of the migrants from their roots. Multicultural and quest for identity is the struggling issue of the novel.

Lahiri's second novel *The Lowland* revolves around a Bengali immigrant family in the U.S. it is a story of two brothers about fate, exile and dilemma. The Lowland is different in that

the isolation comes not from American culture but from within. The novel reveals within the Indian context and it has few source to expose on diasporic grounds. But sincere effort will be made to analyze to come out with the relevant issues.

Lahiri's short story *Hell-Heaven* deals about the struggle of Bengali culture living in the United States. The novel deals with the clash of cultural identity through the characters of Usha, Pranab and Kaku to choose one culture over the other. It shows the dilemma of characters to impress locality but the hidden cultural roots are always alerts them to not to give up their own. It is the crisis of identity to accept or quit from cultural imbalance as depicted by the writer.

Chapter III

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni a prolific writer and a leading novelist award winning author in Asian American literature present her works with utmost curiosity to the readers on ancient tales, Indian fragrance, fantasy, mysticism and expatriate experience. She writes novels, short stories and poems on vivid themes. Her writings explores on multiculturalism and quest for identity, here identity refers to cultural, gender and feminine sensibility of Indian diaspora.

C.B.Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* is Indian contextual Anju and Sudha are cousin sisters of Indian hindu family living in India and America. The social life of Indians is of patriarchal society, Sunil and Ramesh are dominated over their wives (Anju and Sudha). The novel is female subjectivity, an emotional journey of love, jealous and frustration of Indian female characters. She expertly projects the challenges, freedom and crossness of modern day America with the issues of personal and cultural identity faced by each woman in Indo-American relationships.

C.B.Divakrauni's *The Vine of Desire* is sequel to her novel Sister of My Heart. It is a story of two young women (Anju and Sudha) far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood and after a year of living separate lives is rekindling their friendship in America. The struggling of migrated characters and helping them each other in foreign land portrays the alienation and inevitable condition of their visit to America depicts Indian diaspora.

C.B.Divakrauni's another novel *The Mistress of Spices* adopts a more complex strategy for portraying diasporic identity. She makes the use of fable in order to explore the various kinds

of problems encountered by immigrants. Through the character of Tilo or Tilottama, who had trained to extract the essence of the spices and make them to alleviate their pain and live their better lives. The novel allowed by the powers that to be work magic only for the good of her own people (Indians). The others, (Americans) they must go elsewhere for their need. The aggressiveness of national boundaries had become the topic of discussion on diasporic elements.

Chapter IV

Anita Rau Badami

Anita Rau Badami, one of the modern writers in the field of Indian diasporic literature, even with her few literary works, has been able to carve a niche for her in the literary world.

Badami's debut novel *Temarind Mem* is a depiction of the relationship between a mother and a daughter who are trying to make sense of their past with different perceptions. The two main characters Kamini and Saroja are use their memories to reach a final consensus of searching their identity.

Badami's *The Hero's walk* portrays India in microcosm through life in a small fictitious Toturpuram near Madras. It is about Sripati Rao, his wife Nirmala and their families. The novel depicts Indian society, climate, issues of women, religious and social rituals in Indian culture and tradition. The issue of settlement of Nandana a foreigner in Indian tradition is presented in Indian diaspora.

Badami's *Can you Hear the Nightbird Call?* narrates the story of three women, Sharan, Leela and Nimmo linked in love and tragedy over a long span of time. The novel provides picture of daily sights, culture and society of both India and Canada. The partition of India and Pakistan lead to unnatural and forced migration of people to different places across the globe.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In concluding the issues, the chapter would be the summing of the arguments, statements and observations recorded in the earlier chapters. The fact findings of the study will be elaborately discussed and analyzed. The basic and foremost important question to us is, at what extent the study will be useful to look after or compare with other piece of literature or at what

extent the scope is exposed to meet the global challenges and how it will be solved and how the writers presented their works to the readers will be exposed.

It would be the concern of the study to correlate and examine the objectives and record findings and provide transparent answers to discussed queries and enhance the value of the writers and Indian diaspora contributed in the progress of new branch of study in South Asian diasporic literature.

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